

Practical Tips for Parents: Treating Depression in Children and Teens

Tips for Parents: How to Care for Your Child's Mental Health

1. Know your family's medical history so you can identify early warning signs.
2. Trust your instincts and pay attention to a child's complaints, such as "I don't feel well."
3. Stay attuned to changes in your child's behavior or activities.
4. Educate yourself on the signs and symptoms of mental health disorders. Separate "fact from fiction" by using credible sources with information based on medical science rather than rumor or opinion. Beware of extreme claims, such as antidepressants are "always dangerous" or "never effective." Ask your family doctor if you have questions.
5. Knowing that your child may need help is hard to accept. Don't blame yourself. Mental health problems are not a symptom of bad parenting they are common and very treatable.
6. Seek help if your child shows signs of a mental health problem. Start with your pediatrician since ruling out any physical health problem should be the first step of your child's care.
7. Advocate for your child. If his or her provider does not recognize telltale signs, seek a second opinion. If your spouse cannot admit your child has a problem, continue to assert the truth: that s/he has an illness, but can get better. If you meet insurance hurdles, don't be deterred from getting your child help.
8. Discuss all available treatment options with your child's doctor, and carefully weigh all the risks and benefits associated with each treatment.
9. Stay attuned to how your child responds to treatments. Make sure s/he receives a thorough evaluation, continual follow-up and careful monitoring - particularly in the first several weeks - by your doctor.
10. Educate yourself about the warning signs of both mental disorders and suicide. Learn your child's earliest warning signs, like changes in sleeping and eating habits, irritability or poor school performance. Act quickly if you are concerned. Many people are afraid to discuss the issue of suicide for fear of "planting" the idea - it is better to be open and direct.
11. Do not abruptly discontinue or change treatments -- it can lead to significant side effects.
12. Know that your child will get better.
13. Remember that the worst possible situation for a child with a mental health problem is to go without any treatment at all.

What You Need to Know...



"If a child has a headache for two weeks, parents take them to get checked out by a doctor - parents need to do the same if their child feels depressed," said Faenza. "We must arm parents with the questions to ask, the facts to know and the factors to consider to make the best decisions for their child and family."

A number of resources to help families are available by calling the NMHA Resource Center at 1-800-969-6642 or visiting www.mentalhealthamerica.net. Information is also available by calling Mental Health America of Wisconsin at (414) 276-3122 or www.mhawisconsin.org.

Mental Health America (MHA) is the country's oldest and largest nonprofit organization addressing all aspects of mental health and mental illness. With more than 340 affiliates nationwide, MHA works to improve the mental health of all Americans through advocacy, education, research and service.

www.mhawisconsin.org